37 - CONCEPTUAL NOTES REGARDING THE SPORTS IN NATURE

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Introduction

Conceptual problems and confusions are retracing in the sociological approach regarding the sport. In some way these problems may be due to the present of the sport in the mix of the social sciences, that bring us back only to the end of the 1950 decade, where finally the sport begin to become object of a relatively respectful analysis from social sciences (BRANDÃO, 1994, p. 41).

More recently we may see the arising and consolidation of the new sport modes. Some reflections and conclusions developed by the sport sociology may be applied upon these new modes at the same time they introduce new problems and challenges to these theories. In this way the conceptual problems is detached.

The conceptual problem regarding the sports, whether in the new names or in the social definitions set up by the academy, shows that this discussion is not enough. This lack of amplitude is still more evident when we refer to sport practices happening more contemporaneously, like the adventure sports, where the social sciences so far did not dedicate enough time and effort for its understanding. In addition there is the typical polysemic character inherent to the concept itself of the sport. It is in this picture that we would like to present the problem of conceptualize the sports in the nature.

Upon a fast bibliographic revision it is possible to find a kind of a “cloudy concept”. The words used for the designation and characterization of these practices is fuse, not precise and lacking consensus. The difficulty in making a concept able to define and characterize with some precision these practices generates an additional difficulty for the investigations. In a tentative to supply these demands, many terms have been used in an even more spread way and yet less conceptual, a reason why we will not refer to them. The fact is that there are too many concepts used for the definition of the same object of the study. Far from clarifying this increases the confusion instead.

Usually it is said that these practices generate a definitely break up with some more fundamental characteristics with respect to the traditional sport concept, up to the point that they are not accepted as sports. These discussions driven to the start off concepts so disparate and confuse, as the same flow of terminologies that are used in a scattered way. In other words, the question presented here, regards to the possibility of comprehension of these activities as sport. These practices may be really considered as sports? What could be considered as a sport in the nature? The approach into this uneasiness is what we would like to do in this work.

Summing up ... to be or not to be sportive?

In a fast revision about the sport concept we find in Bracht (2003) the saying “it refer to a body activity of movements with competitive character” (p. 14). The straight comprehension of this concept for the interpretation of sports in the nature generates some difficulties. The problem regarding this appropriation is in the interpretation of competition as a central element of its characterization. According to someone's, it would not occur in the body practices in the nature. It is said the opposite, that in these practices it is possible to find a kind of cooperative and collaborative character. From this come two mistakes. The first is to look at the sport as a competitive character practice only. The second is the sport in nature interpretation as lacking the competitive character. Both conceptions lack for not taking into consideration the plurality of meanings inherent to the proper concept of sports.

In the first case, it is a theory mistake that comes from the interpretations of Freud Marxist character regarding the sports, particularly those developed by Jean-Marie Brohm, that were considering them as a competition only (PRONI, 2002). In this case, the sport would be an exact reproduction of the working world, being the leisure elements totally eliminated, which Huizinga was calling of “complete suppression of leisure” (HUIZINGA, 2001). In this type of interpretation the sport would be the “hierarchy of poetry “, driven only by the income principle. However, we believe that the sport is not but the competition, because it is specifically a human activity expressing the most fundamental manifestations of life itself; all the conflicts and perplexities.

These functional analysis make a rigid and mechanical structure conception, where the making of static studies and the maintenance of the functional structures prevail over the changes, and, let us say, are permanent. “It is not necessary to preserve the assumption that all the institutions of a given society have a positive function, without generating costs. There is no need to take as premises that a determined institution is essential for the performance of this or that function” (BURKE, 2002, p.152-3).

Another problem is the creed that these theories may be generalized and this way, to gain universal validity. But at present, it is accepted, each time more, the idea that the functional-structuralism interpretation laws, only under certain conditions, are applicable. And is necessary to consider the existence of many forms of organization of the sport field. There are many ways for the sports to manifest. The Olympic modes are but one way. It is fundamental to insist a little more: in the sport we do not find but the competition and the performance principle. It is true that we find it also, but not it alone.

In the second case, and on the reverse, it is noted the association of the sports in the nature with the cooperative behavior. These interpretations are possible thanks to the effective presence of a type of displacement of the competitive element of the other, from the adversary for himself. This displacement seems indeed to happen, what makes these sports to be a self-competition. In another way, these displacements may happen in the direction of the natural elements. In this case the nature became the opponent of the contest. The Souza's research (2004) regarding the rafting performers shows it clearly when state “the discourse of these rafting practitioners has the mark of the strength, the power, the fight to reach the objective. In the thinking of these actors, the river must be defeated, once it represents a superior strength, swallower, and which will be conquered by them through the cooperation of the team, and also using their weapon, the paddle (p.119).

But if understood in a linear way, these interpretations also will be bound for the failure and imprecision. In this case, both interpretations would be part of one double analysis schema, that compartmentalize the sport phenomenon, being by one side the manifestation of the show and the income and by the other side an expression of the leisure and entertainment. This analysis seems for us to be very superficial and rather mistaken. Therefore, the sport practice, the one that happen in the real world, cannot be divided between the pure gratuitous and the severe seriousness; the functionality and the lack of interest. There are games and practices with predominance in some aspects, but not exclusivity. Is that to say, there is not a sport absolutely and undoubtedly competitive, or on the contrary, cooperative. What really exists is predominance of one or of the other of these aspects. The predominance of the competitive element in the interpretation of the sport phenomenon is a fruit, besides the already mentioned tradition of Marxist analysis, of the massive fusion of the sportive spectacle by the TV network, which maximize the competitive dimension in the name of providing satisfaction for the spectacle

itself.

For the analysis of the sports in the nature, the double interpretation of the sole sport the ones that understand it as a competitive and performatic element by one side, or on the contrary as a funny and cooperative on the other are problematic. First because these sports are provided with more differentiated meanings regarding the competition, as we already mentioned, and according the empiric field data show. This does not mean that the traditional sports be different. The fact is that in this type of interpretation, the heterogenic meanings are not taken into consideration, and the sport is considered as a cultural practice that has a unique meaning.

Otherwise, this is a type of theoretical mistake usual in investigations of the sport field. They fail by neglecting the everyday and micro social appropriation that the sport manifestations are subjected to. Marco Stigger (2002), calls for our attention for the consequences of this fact, which, according the author, makes the majority of the researches pay more attention to the great sport events, with emphasis in the macro social analysis that, we insist, not paying enough attention to the microscopic reality, and keeping apart the theoretical reflections related to the concrete space, where also the sports happen, not taking into consideration the specific and particular cultural contexts. As the author says "the sport has been investigated with interests involved with the great sportive events " (ibid., p.10). In addition , the deep lack of empiric data found in the majority of the works that, nevertheless, tries, necessarily, to be hegemonic generalizing.

In part these prepositions explain the generalized refuse in considering the sports in nature as being sports. As long as the sportive phenomenon is reduced to the competitions and the sports in the nature are identified as "cooperatives", reinforcing even more its segregation of the sports field, once this, as we already said, is identified in a very fast way only with competitive elements. Besides, the identification of the sports in the nature only with the cooperative elements, is so false as the identifications of the traditional sports with competitive elements.

All human movement is, in some way, competitive as far as it happens as an exercise for surpassing the strength, once it is identified with the search for equilibrium, harmony and beauty. The competitiveness should not to be understood as a competition in the superiority demonstration. The movement seems to be always one for the meeting, for the approach looking for winning the distances, obstacles, whether they are physic or psychic (SANTIN, 1987, p.36).

Besides, even though the idea of "purity of vertiginous games" was true and the sport was identified but with the competition, it is not possible to under estimate the power of the sport show society , that, as a rule do not leave anything unharmed, and on a fast way support these sports through the media, and change they into competition, transmuting also the vertiginous game into sport. And more fundamentally, we do not believe that these two categories - game and sport; entertainment and income may continue to be thought off separately. It is necessary urgently to save the idea of the dialectic between the game and the sport. Where in spite of recognizing the difference between these two categories; in the rules, in timing and space, both keeping by one side, the sports fundamental characteristics In other words, the sport is the changed game, enlarged and stabilized. If this relation between game and sport did not exist the sport would not reach the present level of popularity (ELIAS and DUNNING, 1992), because the competition pleasure also is funny. And inversely the "pure game" practices, whether they exist, also keep and receive approach and interference from sport.

About the concept of PAAN

All these polemics and controversies bring us to a term made up by Javier Oliveira Bétran (2003), which has been openly accepted and used, that is the concept of Physical Adventure Activities in the Nature" represented by the short PAAN. "Concepts usually come in packages of presupposes that need to be analyzed carefully" (BURKE, 2002, p.69). Therefore, not pretending to deny in advance this concept, let us study it.

According this author, the sport is the most relevant social practice of the modern times; an equivalent of a socio-cultural of the modernity; a symbol that identifies it. As a counterpart, the new body practices in the nature, would be "original practices of actuality and leisure, physical conceptions different from sport, by the body model in which they are based, by the motivation and the practice conditions, by the objectives to be reached or by the way used for its development" (p.164).

Even though we accept the idea that the sports in the nature are identified with a more present social picture, under the more academic point of view, it has been frequently named as post-modernity, we also believe that the sportive phenomenon refers to a social practice conceived inside the society, and in some way it is determined by it. This discussion brings up the existent ambiguity into the proper idea of post-modernity, and we may question how the term is understood? Therefore, being understood like the start of a new historic period; demanding, almost in a compulsory way, to understand cultural practices identified with these social transformations, with no relationships with "modern practices".

Not pretending to firm up conclusive positions regarding this dense theoretical debate, that is our characterization of the post-modernity, we agree with a more intermediate perspective. This interpretative perspective considers to be the understanding that the post-modernity is a new era, as a bit of overstatement, at the same time that fill the evident transformations that are happening inside the cultural circles.

Adding the prefix "post" to modernity, makes reference to the proper idea of modernity. That is to say , it is something that comes later; that follows. So, the sports in the nature, though associated to the post-modern picture, would be transformations in the sportive phenomenon; would be sports that come after; but that in some way provide continuity to the process started before.

To go further, we dare to say that in the sports in the nature even though identified in the post-modernity picture there is no theoretical-conceptual break with respect to the modern or traditional sports. And yet, we would dare to say that what happen with these "new sports" it is nothing but a deepen in the sporting process started by modernity. They give continuity to the same process and also go beyond, deepening. But historically, what would be the modern process of sporting?

First, the transformation of body culture elements into sports, that is, the regulation of the amusements, here understood in the Elysium sense. Second, the orientation of such practices, already changed in sports, by cosmopolitan and universal desire through the set up of rigid rules, followed by the burocracy of its institutions. A whole process that the development of the sports in the nature seems to reproduce, what would entitle us to deal with it like a sport. That is what this phenomenon seems to be.

But we are not proposing a homogeneous "reading" from sport. Far from it, the sports in the nature always should be taken as a sport sub-culture. That is, in spite of its growing professionalism and making the sportive spectacle, each time more evident, we would continue making mistake regarding the approach, dealing but with the perspective of institutionalization and sportive regulation. The setting aside of these sportive modes, live together in harmony and contradiction with a trading process enforced since the beginning of these sports. However, we should not underestimate the fact that many nature sportive modes were promoted up to the status of philosophic principles and existence, what at the same time give them distinctive and multiple meanings.

All the problems so far mentioned here, when grouped in more general categories, refer to the challenge of analyzing the social changes. And drive us to the old discussion about thesis of continuity and discontinuity in the sport social history. These theses are connected and reduced in a tough and vulgar way, respectively to the understanding of the sport as an essential nature or, on the contrary, like a historic-social nature.

In other words, the sports answer to very precise and determined social demands. The way to practice sports

and/or to exercise is compatible with the cultural conditions of the population that make the practices, so the sport is a fun and symbolic representation of the way of life of a determined society. Thus, our theory option in adopting the compatibility principle between sport and culture.

In addition, the sport taken as a cultural product is dynamic, subject to changes in its historic process, following the structural changes undertook by the contemporary society. So we should keep far away from the canonization trial of a determined way of the sport expression, and understand that this cultural manifestation, as all the other ones, is dynamic. Changes occurred in the way the sport behave socially, more or less composes a new configuration of the sportive phenomenon, without lack of characterization, once they are but adaptation and appropriation to the proper configuration that the society and all its cultural practices are subject to. It is an actualization; an adaptation of the sportive practices that before were subjected to the modernity context, to the post-modern conditions of life.

In the same way we should also to avoid this execrable try in the saintification of some theory models of analysis, already exhausted. If there is difficulty for the interpretation of a determined social phenomenon, starting from a certain analysis model, the inadequacy is not in the investigated phenomenon, but in the model, that indicates weakness. Let us remember that the theory analysis models should be adjustable to the studied object, not the contrary. To insist in this type of idea is so inconvenient as inadequate. It represents the hierarchy inversion of the ethics, so, once more, it is the analysis method that should be adjustable to the object, not the opposite. .

The confusion coming from the identification of the cultural phenomenon, subject to numberless appropriations and significations, is emblematic with the “official” institutions that represent but a model of practice among the many other possible. The general refuse for the acceptance of these new practices, as compounding one more sportive manifestation, probably should come from this inexorable tight up to the hegemonic sportive institutions, being these last ones decisively and truly under the influence of one excessive valorization of the competition. Again we are facing an element that drive us toward the problem of the blind and dogmatic use of theory conceptions of functional-structural analysis, that “do not care with people, but with structures” (BURKE, 2002, p. 153).

The outcome of this theory questioning,seems to be for us quite evident, up to the point we refuse them. To take as premises that the surf and the soccer, for example, belong to different sub-cultures is at least exaggerated. It is true that these modes belong to different sub-cultures, but with a minimum of common references. What become more evident nowadays, where the cultural distance between the two modes seems to reduce more each time. The vertiginous movement of the sportive elements of the body culture proves this fact. But the emphasis in the structures analysis always tend to the stagnation and immobilization, and do not consider, frequently, the influence of some groups, individuals and events in the changes of a determined culture. The blind and dogmatic attachment to sacred theories, makes to forget that the human institutions always manifest in a multiple and varied way.

In our case, we are trying to refer us to the social sportive phenomenon as a whole, that is the manifestation and expression of a cultural symbol that is much bigger than the pretentious institutions, which try to represent them. We pretend to think the sport beyond the institutional look. This way, it would be a great reduction to understand this object under the exclusive focus of the competitive element or starting from the representations made by this hegemonic and institutional (structural) model. Considering the relevant contribution of Javier Oliveira Bétran for the study of the sports in the nature, we fill at easy for formulate criticism and refuse his concept of PAAN. In this sense, what we are proposing here is more than the acceptance of the sports in the nature as being a sport. We are fundamentally proposing an enlarged comprehension of the sport concept itself.

The least reason for our option of treating this phenomenon in the “hall” of the sportive phenomenon, but not less important, is the fact that the use of the term sport is more universal and usual among the population in general. Once more, the Peter Burke reflections, now regarding the use of technical terms in the mix of the social theory, also may be applied in this situation. Especially when says that,

Some of them (technical terms) do not have any equivalent in the common language and, due to the lack of words to express them, we may not realize some aspects of the social reality. Other terms are defined in a more precise ways that their equivalents of the common language and, this way, make possible more perfect distinctions and a more rigorous analysis. (BURKE, 2002, p. 68).

The author itself call for our attention for the fact that the anthropologists, some time ago, are emphasizing the need in studying the ways the “common people” experience the society and its conceptual categories used for its understanding. They stress the necessity of using whether the official categories as the non-officials; the necessity to make use of popular models or of the action plans that provide the meaning to this world of experiences. It is evident that this may be easily applied to the sport studies. So, also it is necessary to study the ways the “common performer” experienced the sport, not only the athletes, understood as “official performers”. Also it is necessary to study the conceptual categories used by the “common performers" to apprehend the sports. Without this, probably, the cultural practices and all their symbols will stay intelligible. Perhaps because of this, these considerations only make sense for those that, in fact, wish to face with the reality facts; for those that in fact pretend to face with the concrete of the lived and not only wandering through the universe of theory; for those that in fact are interested in the true life.

In a least analysis, It is not the case of substituting the popular terms by academic terms or the contrary, it is a matter of making them complementary. In the same way, also it is not the case of to understand the empiric and the theory as opposite phenomenon's, it is the case of using them in a skilful, coherent and reciprocal way.

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CONCEPTUAL NOTES REGARDING THE SPORTS IN NATURE

Abstract

The increase in the number of possibilities of body practices generates new problems for the sport theories. Among them we detach the conceptual problems arising from the present expansion of activities made in the middle of nature. The contemporarily of these practices is claiming for more attention and careful exam from the human sciences. However, the study developments on this area always face a certain conceptual confusion generated in its inside. The lack of consensus and of the terminology precision generates some additional difficulties for the investigations. Our objective in this work is to point out some theoretical and conceptual dilemmas placed by the process of using the open nature for the sports practices.

KEY WORDS: leisure; sports in open nature; concept.

NOTES CONCEPTUELLES CONCERNANT LES SPORTS DANS LA NATURE

Resumé

L'élargissement des possibilités de pratiques corporelles place nouveaux problèmes pour les théories du sport. Nous détachons les problèmes conceptuels apparus de la récente expansion d'activités réalisées dans la nature. L´actualité de ces pratiques impose un regard, à chaque fois plus attentif des sciences humaines. Néanmoins, le développement d'études dans ce secteur se rencontre toujours avec une certaine confusion conceptuelle produite à son intérieur. L´absence de consensus et l'imprécision des termes créent quelques difficultés supplémentaires pour leurs recherches. Notre objectif dans ce travail est de proposer une discussion des problèmes d´origine théorique et conceptuelle placées par le processus d'utilisation de la nature pour la pratique des sports.

Mots-clés: loisir ; sports dans la nature ; concept.

NOTAS CONCEPTUALES CON RESPECTO A LOS DEPORTES EN NATURALEZA

Resumen

La ampliación de las posibilidades de prácticas corporales presenta nuevos problemas para las teorías del deporte. Una desas ampliaciones y nuevos problemas conceptuales puedem ser identificadas cuando piensamos en las actividades realizadas en la naturaleza. Estas nos exigen una mirada cada vez más cuidadosa desde el punto de vista de las ciencias humanas. Sin embargo, cuando observamos el desarrollo de estudios en este sector encuentramos siempre una cierta confusión conceptual. En verdad, la ausencia de consenso y la imprecisión terminologica crean algunas dificultades para las investigaciones. Nuestro objetivo en este trabajo consiste en proponer un debate de los problemas teórico y conceptual alrededor de los estudios sobre la utilización de la naturaleza para la práctica de los deportes.

Palabras clave: ocio; deportes en la naturaleza; concepto

NOTAS CONCEITUAIS SOBRE OS ESPORTES NA NATUREZA

Resumo

A ampliação no número de possibilidades de práticas corporais coloca novos problemas para as teorias do esporte. Entre todos, destacamos os problemas conceituais surgidos da recente expansão de atividades realizadas em meio à natureza. A contemporaneidade dessas práticas tem exigido um olhar cada vez mais atento e cuidadoso das ciências humanas. Contudo, o desenvolvimento de estudos nessa área depara-se sempre com uma certa confusão conceitual gerada em seu interior. A falta de consenso e a imprecisão terminológica criam algumas dificuldades adicionais para suas investigações. Nosso objetivo neste trabalho é pontuar alguns dilemas teóricos-conceituais colocados pelo processo de utilização da natureza para prática de esportes.

PALAVRAS-CHAVES: lazer; esportes na natureza; conceito.